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## DOCUMENTS RELATING TO PUBLIC AFFAIRS.

REPORT OF A COMMITTEE TO THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE EDUCATION OF THE POOR, OF IRELAND, RECEIVED AT A MEETING HELD IN DUBLIN, JUNE 13TH, 1814.

**Y**OUR committee having completed their year of office, deem it their duty, in yielding up the trust reposed in them, to lay before the society the transactions of that period. But before they proceed to the performance of this duty, they feel themselves called upon once more to submit to the public, through the medium of their report, the objects of your institution, and the principles upon which it was founded and has been conducted. Deeply impressed with the importance of every opportunity of attracting the attention of the public; and of thus obtaining from it a serious investigation of the principles and conduct of your institution. They are not disposed to ask for patronage or support unless its importance shall appear to merit, and the state of its funds to demand it. If however these two points shall be established, they trust they will be justified in calculating upon the co-operation of every patriotic and liberal Irishman.

Your committee rejoice, that it is no longer necessary to adduce arguments to prove, what appears almost self-evident, that education, properly directed, is a source of happiness to individuals, and of benefit to society. Some good and enlightened men have, indeed, formerly entertained doubts upon the subject; but the question is now fortunately at rest, and all seem to unite in the sentiment so well expressed by a late eminent Irish prelate "that education makes all the difference between wild beasts and useful animals, all the distinction between the Hottentot and the European, between the savage and the man." But although it will not be denied, that it is most desirable to diffuse the blessings of education as widely as possible, some persons may think that the means of instruction already in existence are sufficient for that purpose, and to such it will be necessary to say a few words, respecting

BELFAST MAG. NO. LXXII.

the schools for the education of the poor, now established in the country.

Your committee are aware, that large provision has been made as well from the public purse as through the bounty of individuals, for the endowment of schools in different parts of Ireland; but these schools, though they may be excellent in their kind, are comparatively speaking, few in number; and from the peculiar circumstances of this country, are not open to the great body of our labouring poor, to those, in fact, who stand most in need of education.

The effects, however, of these establishments being closed against so great a portion of the population of Ireland, has not been to keep them in total ignorance of letters. The inhabitants of this country possess a natural taste for learning, an appetite for intellectual improvement, which must and will be gratified. The consequence is, that village schools and itinerant masters, are scattered pretty generally throughout the country.

But what is the character of those *Schools*? And what is the description of the *Teachers*? What *Books* have been in general use amongst them? And what *principles* are likely to be acquired by the *scholars*? The best information which your committee have received on this subject, obliges them to state, that with a very few exceptions, the only object attended to in these schools, is to instruct in reading, writing, and arithmetic; whilst cleanliness of person, decency of language, and regularity of conduct, are totally neglected. The books used in them are often of the most pernicious tendency, and even the slight knowledge of letters and figures which is thus acquired, is perhaps more than counterbalanced by the sacrifice of time necessary to attain it.

Notwithstanding these defects however every school is crowded with children. Extreme poverty does not prevent the parent from dispensing with the services of his children, in domestic or agricultural employments, in order to afford them opportunities of attending the neighbouring school; and many instances have come within the knowledge of your committee, where both the parent and the child have cheerfully reduced their scanty means for

food and clothing, to enable them to pay the monthly pittance to the head or village school-master.

Hence it appears that those seminaries where good order and regular habits are attended to, are almost totally inaccessible to the vast majority of the labouring poor, and that the schools of an inferior description which have supplied their place (even if they were sufficiently numerous) are yet highly objectionable, from the tedious and irregular systems adopted in them, the total disregard of the masters to the morals of the children, from the pernicious books which are used in them, and from that want of due discipline, which forms perhaps the most valuable part of the education of youth.

Your committee would therefore hope, that the means of instruction now placed within the reach of the great body of the people of Ireland, instead of inclining the public mind against your institution, will afford an additional and powerful argument in its favour: for (to use the words of an official document,) "were it even admitted that the benefits of education are not to the lower classes\* of the people as great as we conceive them to be, yet the necessity of assisting in or obtaining it for them in this country, would not be diminished but increased; for such education as has been objected to, under the idea of its leading to evil rather than to good, they are actually obtaining for themselves; and though we conceive it practicable to correct it, to check its progress appears impossible, it may be improved, but cannot be impeded."

A desire to remedy those defects, and to supply those deficiencies in the existing system for the education of the poor of this country, led to the formation of your institution. It was founded on the 2d of December, 1811, by a few individuals, some of whom having been engaged for years in the support and management of an extensive school† for the

children of the poor, in the populous manufacturing district of the metropolis, were thus convinced by their own personal experience, of the advantages which must result from an improved system of education becoming prevalent in this country.

At one of the earliest meetings of your society, (6th January, 1812) the following resolution was adopted: "That the education of the poor of Ireland being the basis on which its morals and true happiness can be best secured, it is highly important that schools should be established, *divested of all Sectarian distinctions in every part of the arrangement.*"

This fundamental resolution appeared to the founders of your society the "best calculated to meet the circumstances of the poor of Ireland," and your committee have the pleasure to say, that it has been very generally approved of in the country, and seems to have met with the sanction of the *Commissioners of Education*; who in their 14th report, presented to the house of commons (under the date of the 30th October 1812) express their opinion. "that no plan for the education of the lower classes in Ireland, however wisely and unexceptionably contrived in other respects, can be carried into effectual execution in this country, unless it be explicitly avowed and clearly understood, as its leading principle, that no attempt shall be made to influence or disturb, the peculiar religious tenets of any description of Christians."

This resolution, embodied in an address to the public, was immediately printed and extensively circulated, and the objects of the society were then declared to be—to promote the establishment and facilitate the conducting of schools, upon the principle just mentioned, wherein the poor might be taught reading, writing and arithmetic in a cheap and expeditious manner. That with this view, they should obtain and communicate information, as to best plans for building and fitting up schools, and should contribute (as far as their funds would allow) to the expence incurred upon this head by local associations. That they should assist in procuring properly qualified school-masters, and in furnishing books, stationery,

\* Fourteenth Report of the Commissioners of Education, &c.

† The attention of the public is invited to this school: it is situated in School-street, in the parish of St. Catharine. Annual reports of its progress have been printed for some years past, which can be had at the school, and will be found extremely interesting to the promoters of education.

The model school of this society, which will be noticed hereafter, is under the same roof.

and other articles necessary for schools at reduced prices; and that the attention of the society should be directed to the new and improved system of education, because it lays its foundation upon the sacred scriptures, and combines economy with due discipline, on which accounts it appears eminently adapted to the wants and circumstances of Ireland.

Such were the motives which called your society into existence, such the objects it proposed to achieve, and such the principles on which it is pledged to proceed.

The report for the year 1812 (being the only one as yet published by the society) informed you of the progress then made.

Many important subjects presented themselves to the attention of your committee immediately upon their appointment. Several benevolent individuals as well as local associations, were desirous to establish schools upon an improved principle. They had heard of valuable improvements in point of *economy*, of *simplicity*, of *discipline*, and of *expedition*; but they knew not where to seek for information upon the subject. They were totally at a loss for a good plan, upon which to erect or fit up a school-house: and even if a building were erected, they knew not how to procure a competent master or mistress, or where to purchase suitable books.

In fact, so many obstacles opposed themselves in the outset of the project, that it is not to be wondered at if many were discouraged or disabled from carrying it into execution.

To endeavour to supply these numerous wants, was accordingly the first business of your committee. The report of the last year announced that a tract\* was pre-

pared and then in the press, giving suitable directions for building, fitting up, and arranging school-rooms upon approved plans. This tract has been since published, and a considerable part of the impression circulated through Ireland. Your committee recommend it to the attention, to erect buildings, or to adapt houses already built, for the purposes of instruction, as being calculated to save expense and inconvenience, not only in the first outfit, but in the future conduct and management of schools. It contains a few plates, which have been annexed in order to furnish architects and tradesmen in the country with a few ground plans and sections of the necessary buildings, desks, benches, &c. &c.

One of the most striking improvements lately introduced into general use in schools is, that one book shall answer for an entire school, though it should contain some hundreds of scholars. A spelling book upon this plan, was compiled under the direction of the former committee, and was in the press when they went out of office. During the year which has now closed, the spelling book has been published, and a reading book, upon the same principle, carefully compiled, printed and published†.

Your committee may be permitted to remark that in preparing and publishing those two books, and especially the latter, your institution has rendered a most valuable service, indeed, to the cause of national education; for without them it would have been vain to attempt introducing the improved system of teaching into the schools of Ireland. It may not be improper here to state the principles by which the compilers of the Reading Book were guided in the execution of a work, which they felt to be one of no less difficulty and nicety than of import-

\* The advantages of this improvement, in point of economy, is extremely great. The Spelling Book published by the society, is sold for 5s. 0d. and the Reading Book for 8s. 4d. The former consists of 60, the latter of 100 tablets; they are to be had (with other articles used in schools) at the Repository, School-street. Thus a school containing several hundred of scholars, is supplied with sufficient books for teaching them spelling and reading, at the trivial expence of 13s. 4d. which need not be incurred again for some years, if reasonable care be taken of the books by the teachers. It must be gratifying to

the members of the society to perceive, by reference to the accounts presented with this report, that whilst schools are relieved from heavy expense, and are furnished at so cheap a rate with such lessons as they could not formerly procure at any price, the funds of the institution will be increased by the sale of these publications.

† It is for sale at the Societies' Repository, School-street, and is entitled "*First and Directions for building, fitting up, and arranging School Rooms*—Price 10d.

ance. Their object was to combine as much useful matter as possible, and at the same time to avoid every topic which could be offensive or objectionable to any, for whom it was designed. They therefore kept steadily in view the excellent fundamental principle of your society, and were most solicitous, that whilst it should contain some religious truths, nothing should be introduced of a sectarian tendency, or which could possibly excite jealousy, or uneasiness in the minds of pious persons, of any religious denomination. It contains much matter extracted from the sacred scriptures, but in order to avoid even a suspicion that selections were made of particular passages, for the purpose of inculcating any peculiar doctrinal opinions, the compilation in this respect has been made from books used in the schools in this country for many years past, namely, from "Dilworth's" and the "Pennsylvanian Spelling Books" and from "Reading made Easy." Indeed the constitution of your committee, composed as it is, of persons of various religious communions, should in itself afford a sufficient security against such a suspicion; and your committee could refer you to the minutes of its proceedings, from the 10th to the 31st of July, in order to satisfy you of the pains which were taken, that the contents of the Reading Book should be examined by every member of their body, and that they should be altogether unexceptionable in every point of view. Selections conveying good moral and useful information, in a style pleasing to learners, have been made principally from the works of the well known Lindley Murray, and combined with the foregoing. It is gratifying to your committee to be enabled to state, that these publications appear to have met with very general approbation. Many sets of them have been sold for the use of schools in the most distant parts of this country, and applications are more frequently received for them as they become more generally known. The sales to schools during the last month have been more than double the amount of sales during any month preceding; and your committee cannot refrain from mentioning a circumstance which afforded them considerable satisfaction, as proving that the execution of their more difficult task had been approved of in the sister Island. An order has been lately received from Birmingham, for three copies of the Read-

ing Book, for the use of schools in the neighbourhood of that town. This was felt to be the more flattering, as books on the same principle have been published in England.

Your committee, however, aware that imperfections will probably exist in a new work of this nature, would anxiously solicit the suggestions of all persons, who may be disposed to contribute, towards rendering a second edition more correct and complete.

Your committee also state that you have still much to do in this department of your duty, and that other elementary works on the same plan will be absolutely necessary.

Nor can they avoid noticing the difficulty which now exists of procuring proper books of any description, (either of instruction or amusement) for the use of the poor. It is not merely for school use, that such publications are necessary, when children have acquired the power of reading, it is natural to suppose they will exercise their new faculty, and if good matter be not provided, it is to be feared the bad will still be resorted to. The reading books now to be met with, both in schools, and in the houses of the poor, are often of the most pernicious tendency, and your committee did intend to have suggested the propriety (if ever your funds should be sufficient) of printing and publishing cheap and instructive works for the use of the poor; but they have great pleasure in mentioning that a society has been just formed for that sole purpose\*.

With the same view your Committee would point your attention to the advantage that must result from the formation of *lending Libraries* in the different establishments for the education of the poor. They would not only be the means of placing instructive books within the reach of the poor at a less expence than could be otherwise effected, but they would also afford an additional inducement to the reading of such books, for (as was well observed by the superintendent of the Belfast school, in a letter to your secretary) "if a book be lent, and is to be returned on a certain day, the probability is, that the book will be read within the time; but if given entirely, the reading of it may be deferred until a more convenient

\* The Cheap Book Society, &c. &c. See the Appendix.

opportunity, which opportunity may not soon arrive; as we are all ready enough to postpone doing, what we know we can do at any time."

Your committee being of opinion that many valuable suggestions are to be found in the letter just adverted to, bearing upon various branches of the undertaking in which you are engaged, beg leave to lay an extract from it before you, in the Appendix to this Report\*, and they are led here to remark, that one great advantage flowing from such an institution as your's is, that a centre is thereby established, to which useful and interesting communications, upon the subject of public education, may be directed from every quarter, and from which the improvements derived therefrom may be generally diffused throughout the country.

The next topic adverted to in the report of your late committee, is the advantage to be derived from the establishment of a *School* in this city, to which the society may point as a *model* for the method of instruction recommended by it; and which should also be used as a seminary wherein young men might be trained, to act as school masters, and from whence they might be sent, as occasion should require, to superintend or organize schools in different parts of Ireland.

The report then stated the application, on this subject made by your committee to the gentlemen conducting the School-street-schools, and the readiness with which they expressed their desire to co-operate (as far as in their power) with your society in this part of your plan.

A room in the School-street establishment, capable of containing 250 scholars, together with its full complement of boys, has been placed under the direction of your committee, (subject of course to the rules of the School-street Society) and this school has been at work during the last nine months. Your committee recommend it to the attention of the public as the best existing *model* in Ireland, of the improved system of education.

The management of it is entrusted to Mr. John Veevers, (the gentleman alluded to in the last report) who having been recommended as a person eminently qualified to communicate all the late improvements in education, has been engaged

by your committee at a salary of £200 per annum. This is certainly a large salary, particularly so when compared with your present list of subscribers; but your committee hope that the advantages to be derived from this gentleman's experience, will justify them in incurring such an expense.

The attention of your committee has been much directed to this school, with a view to ascertain the advantages of the method of teaching introduced by Mr. Veevers, compared with the plan of instruction used in the School-street school; and they hope by these means to be enabled to combine whatever is valuable in either; and thus to form such a system for the education of the poor, as shall be most likely to forward the objects of your Institution.

Your committee have also directed their attention to this *model school*, as well as to the old schools in School street, in consequence of the frequent applications which have been made to them, for directions and explanations, respecting the mode of instruction recommended by your society. It has been found quite impossible to give adequate information on this subject, either by letter or oral communication; and as there are many persons engaged in the superintendence of schools in remote parts of Ireland, who would find it impossible to visit any model school, established in this city, though very desirous of information respecting it, it becomes extremely desirable to publish a detailed account of the plans recommended by you, which shall be accompanied with illustrations, so that it may, as far as possible, supply the place of personal inspection. Considerable progress has been made, in preparing and arranging matter, for such a publication, and your committee would strongly recommend that it shall be completed as early as possible in the ensuing year.

Shortly after the *model school* was established, and a suitable field thereby provided for exercising and training school masters, your committee endeavoured to make it useful to the public in that respect, as far as the straitened circumstances of the society would permit. Accordingly about five months since, an advertisement was published, in sixteen of the most respectable provincial prints in Ireland, stating that the school of the society in School-street, was then opened for the

\* For the letter at full length, see the Belfast Magazine Vol. 12, page 93.

reception of young men properly recommended, who should be taught and trained to act as school masters, *free of all expence for instruction*. That the society was not then enabled to carry into effect its intended plan, of dieting and lodging, as well as educating young men, to be sent out *by it*, to act as school masters in the country; but was obliged to confine itself to the *instruction* of such young men as should be sent to the school. That every possible assistance however, would be given towards providing eligible places where they ought to be dieted and lodged at the expence of those by whom they should be recommended, and where their morals should be carefully attended to.

Some measure of this kind was absolutely necessary; numerous applications were made from various parts of Ireland for competent masters to organize or superintend schools, and your committee (to use the strong language of the Commissioners of Education) being "persuaded that a more essential service could not be rendered to the state, than by carrying into effect a practicable mode of supplying a succession of well qualified instructors for the children of the lower classes," determined to adopt the expedient just mentioned, as being the best calculated of any *within its power*, a want so urgent in its nature, and so generally felt in every part of the country. A few young men have been admitted into the seminary, who were recommended to your committee by the directors of different schools, in consequence of the beforementioned advertisement, and a table will be found in the appendix, stating the names, ages, and other circumstances relative to these young men, the schools for which they were trained, the number of scholars in each of these schools, and the period which it required to qualify for the performance of their duty as teachers, such of them as have left the seminary.

Your committee having now detailed the proceedings of the past year, cannot omit stating, that every step they took had been impeded, by the lamentable inadequacy of your funds. They have worked in fetters, and were, therefore, unable to accomplish your plans, to the extent required. So very limited indeed, have been the pecuniary resources, placed at their disposal, that but for the liberality of the gentlemen conducting the School-street establishment, they would have been obliged to postpone altogether two

of the most valuable parts of your plan, namely, the *Model School*, and the *Seminary for training Masters*. And although the very friendly co-operation of those gentlemen has enabled your committee to do something with respect to them, yet they are well satisfied, that the arrangements made at School-street, must ever prove inadequate to the attainment of the objects in view; and that unless you shall be enabled to erect a building, expressly for the purpose of establishing in it a *Model School*, and a *Seminary for training Masters*, the public cannot receive the full benefit proposed by you, from those branches of your institution. Your committee would also suggest the great advantages which would be derived from having a person in your employment, qualified to organize schools, who might be sent for that purpose to such parts of the country as the society should judge most expedient.

Your committee hope that this statement of the principles and conduct of your society, will convince the public of its importance to the welfare of this island. And if this be a just expectation, they are very certain that a single glance at the account of your income and expenditure, will satisfy every man, who feels for the value of your institution, of the necessity of contributing to its support. Your committee refer to these accounts for particulars, they will only here remark, that whilst your annual subscriptions for the last year amounted only to £68 9 6 you are under an engagement of £200 per annum, for the salary of Mr. Veevers: and further, that though the necessary *disbursements* of the past year, were no less than £3 7 18 2 the total income of the Society for that period amounted only to £248 2 6 being a deficit of £69 15 7½.

Before they conclude their report, your committee would again anxiously press upon the society, the imperious necessity of adopting means for increasing your funds, more efficient than those hitherto resorted to; and they feel they should not act with candor, if they did not declare their decided opinion, that this institution must fall to the ground, if their successors shall not be able to awaken the serious attention of the wealthy and the liberal to the objects it has in view.

Your committee have been most unwillingly forced to this conclusion, by the mortifying experience of their fruitless attempts to obtain pecuniary aid, during the past year.

The eagerness with which every facility for education has been grasped at by the poorer classes of the community, impressed your committee with the firmest conviction of the advantages likely to result from your institution, and induced them (perhaps imprudently,) not only to exhaust your regular funds, but even to draw upon the anticipated bounty of the public: but they fear they have been too sanguine in their expectations; they, as well as your late committee, appear to have used every effort in their power to give publicity to the objects and principles of your institution, and for this purpose the sum of £134 16 11½ (which some may think excessive,) was expended by the committee for the year ending April, 1813, in order to excite the public attention through the medium of the public press; and your Secretary did by letter apply for support to almost every man of rank and wealth in the country; but such applications have been (with very few exceptions,) totally unattended to, by the persons to whom they were addressed.

It is true, the improvements lately introduced into the systems for the education of the poor, have become the subject of discussion amongst the enlightened, and even the theme of conversation amongst the fashionable, and whenever mentioned, every tongue seems eager to expatiate on the happy consequences which must result from the blessings of education being diffused throughout the country; but there is a lamentable apathy on the subject, when those persons are invited to realize their theories, and carry them into execution.

Your committee know not how to account for this deplorable indifference, to what (in their humble opinion) appears to be of vital consequence to Ireland.

They have endeavoured to steer clear of all objections, arising from the peculiar circumstances of this country. And their object has been to promote a system of education, which shall enable the poor peasant and artizan to acquire information, without encroaching materially on his time or his purse; which shall inculcate principles of honesty and truth, at that time of life when the mind is best prepared to receive them—which shall accustom the poor to habits of decency and cleanliness, at the same time improving their morals and their health; which shall teach them to fix their attention exclus-

sively on whatever business they are engaged in, and inure them to that kind of regular discipline and good order, which is of such essential value to those who must earn their bread by their industry—which shall lay open the scriptures to every poor man, and at the same time be free from even the suspicion of aiming at proselytism, or any interference in religious opinions; and which shall, by these means, afford new sources of innocent amusement, useful knowledge, and religious truth, to the poorest members of the community.

The value of such a system is universally admitted: whence then does it happen that the public are so indifferent about its success? Your Committee are inclined to attribute it to want of due consideration of the subject, and they are confident that this indifference would be succeeded by activity and zeal for your institution, if the wealthy and the liberal amongst our countrymen would seriously consider the consequences, public and private, which must result from such a system becoming prevalent throughout the country. Let them bestow a few moment's serious thought on the subject, and then let them ask themselves, shall we extend our aid to this institution? Or shall we turn aside from it? And whilst we praise the objects it has in view, and the means by which it proposes to attain them,—whilst we warmly express our desire for the promotion of well-ordered education amongst the poor, at the same time, refuse to contribute in the slightest degree to its advancement—in a word, shall we be consistent? Or shall we suffer pecuniary motives, the most paltry and insignificant, to induce us to withhold our aid from an institution which our judgment and our conscience compel us to approve? Let each man put this question to himself, and your society will never need support.

#### PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

*Letters from Major John Cartwright to the Rev. Christopher Wyvill.*

(Continued from Vol. 12, Page 490.)

#### LETTER XVII.

*Strike, but hear!*

DEAR SIR,—Do they who, in this work of Parliamentary Reform, regarders of principle, presume, at their own arbitrary discretion, to propose the re-